



Celebrating the  
Victims of Crime Act

Most Americans have never heard of the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). They may know about domestic violence shelters or rape crisis centers. They may have heard about victim notification systems or victim advocates. Yet they probably do not know that VOCA established the Crime Victims Fund, which provides critical support to their communities.

This year, National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW) celebrates VOCA's achievements. For 25 years, VOCA has provided the assistance people need in the aftermath of crime. Without VOCA, victims of crime would face more challenges with fewer resources.

To engage your community in celebrating VOCA, you will need an effective media campaign. You'll want to tell compelling stories about local victims who have rebuilt their lives through VOCA-funded services. Finding such stories and the television, radio, or newspaper reporters to tell them will help you launch a powerful campaign.

## How to Interest the Media

Throughout the year, you may find opportunities to build relationships with reporters. You can regularly monitor the media to see which reporters cover criminal justice, legal issues, public policy, or health. You can keep a regularly updated list of such reporters (see "Media Lists" on this page). If you notice a particularly thoughtful or well-researched news article or television feature, call or e-mail the reporter to express your appreciation. If you think your organization could provide information for an ongoing news story, contact the media outlet to offer your help. Such outreach makes friends for your organization and positions you as a resource for the media.

Most reporters view National Crime Victims' Rights Week and other such observances as "soft" news, best covered by "human interest" stories that show how victims cope with the aftermath of crime. You might check your own organization's service history for interesting cases that show how VOCA helps your community. If any of the victims you have served agree to share their stories, you can pitch them to local reporters

as part of your campaign. You might suggest a spokesperson from your organization for reporters to interview, or refer reporters to a victim or victim service provider speakers' bureau, if one is operating in your community. If you develop your messages and find resources for reporters ahead of time, you increase your chances of gaining coverage.

## Media Lists

To compile a list of media contacts, you can start with producers and reporters you may have interacted with during the year. Then you can research the following resources to find how to reach more local media:

- **Internet:** You can use your favorite search engine to find the Web sites of local media, which often list editors, producers, and reporters, as well as phone numbers and e-mail addresses for some staff members.
- **Yellow and White Pages:** You can search under "newspapers," "television," or "radio" to find the names of media outlets.
- **Libraries:** Many local libraries keep community media directories in their reference departments. Check this resource for detailed information about local reporters and producers who might be interested in crime-victim issues.

Once you have completed your research on local media, you can use the following sample tools to support your outreach campaign.

## Sample News Release

The sample news release announces National Crime Victims' Rights Week and its theme: "25 Years of Rebuilding Lives: Celebrating the Victims of Crime Act." The release describes the dramatic progress the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) has fostered for crime victims and the important programs VOCA supports. You can use the release to alert local media about the purpose of National Crime Victims' Rights Week and the local observances you are planning.

# Working with the Media

To ensure that local media have complete information on your local NCVRW events, you can submit a one-page media advisory that lists all events, activities, dates, times, locations, sponsors, brief descriptions of the events, and contact information. (See “More Tools” for more information on media advisories.) You can highlight activities for specific groups (e.g., children, older adults) and make sure that organizations serving these groups receive your media advisory and news release.

It’s helpful to send out your NCVRW news release **at least 10 days** before your event. Then you can make follow-up calls to confirm media participation and to provide background information for producers and reporters.

## Sample Public Service Announcements

This Resource Guide provides sample public service announcements (PSAs)—brief on-air messages that you can use to inform your community about National Crime Victims’ Rights Week and to alert victims of crime that services are available for them. For optimum flexibility, we have included three sample scripts—for a 15-second, 30-second, and 60-second PSA—that you can produce with your local television or radio station or use as “live copy” scripts for TV or radio talent to read on the air. Each script should include your organization’s name, phone number, Web site, and e-mail address so viewers and listeners can contact you if they need more information.

The enclosed 2009 NCVRW **Theme DVD** also includes a broadcast-quality 60-second television PSA with space for your organization’s contact information (see script on page 5).

It’s wise to contact the public service departments at your local radio and television stations **at least two months** before National Crime Victims’ Rights Week to explore their willingness to air your message and to find out their deadlines and other requirements for PSAs. When you send your script or completed PSA to the media, include a cover letter describing the importance of National Crime Victims’ Rights Week and VOCA and urging them to air your PSA.

## Sample Op-ed Column

Your media outreach will seek to educate your community about National Crime Victims’ Rights Week and the critical role VOCA plays in assisting victims to rebuild their lives. You can achieve that goal by publishing an “op-ed” in your local newspaper or other publications. Op-eds are opinion pieces, usually printed opposite a newspaper’s editorial page, that present a unique point of view on a topic of current interest. You might begin by focusing on a crime that affects your community and examine the needs of local victims of that crime. Perhaps you can find a victim with a particularly compelling story and then describe the VOCA-funded local services that are available to help that victim. Although you can approach the op-ed from many different angles, your task is to convey in personal

terms why your community and the nation have reason to celebrate VOCA this National Crime Victims’ Rights Week.

## More Tools

**Media Advisories:** You can boost your impact on the media by distributing **media advisories**, or **media alerts**, one-page notifications about newsworthy NCVRW events. Media advisories briefly describe the event you want to publicize and its significance. Advisories then list the “who,” “what,” “where,” “when,” and “why” of the event. After you have distributed your advisory, follow up with calls to the reporters you think might be interested in attending your event. You can also list your event on the “day book” of major news wire services (e.g., Reuters or Associated Press) if they have bureaus in your city. Visit the wire services’ Web sites for information on how to contact their day-book desks.

**Fact Sheets:** This Resource Guide includes a wealth of information about crime trends, the history of the victims’ rights movement, and other facts that will interest reporters, who always need background for their articles. You can increase your chances of gaining publicity by assembling fact sheets on issues highlighted by your campaign—such as national and local crime statistics, the Victims of Crime Act, the Crime Victims Fund, and services for local crime victims. It’s a good idea to have your fact sheets ready before you launch your campaign.

## More Media Strategies

- Contact editors, producers, and station managers *two months* in advance of National Crime Victims' Rights Week.
- Suggest program topics your local media might want to cover during National Crime Victims' Rights Week.
- Ask your mayor and other local officials to issue an NCVRW proclamation, and announce their participation in your news releases. A sample proclamation is provided in Section 2 of this guide.
- Send high-quality video or high-resolution photos or digital images from your NCVRW events to your local television stations and newspapers. Although the media may not have staff to cover your event, they may use the video or photos you provide. Include a caption that identifies everyone in the photo, a short description of the event, and contact information for someone who can answer media inquiries. 25

## VOCA Resources for Reporters

Reporters always need accurate facts and background information for their stories. You can help them gather interesting data about the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) by referring them to the following helpful online resources.

### **OVC Fact Sheet: Victims of Crime Act Crime Victims Fund**

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/factshts/vocacvf/fs000310.pdf>

### **VOCA Nationwide Performance Reports**

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/fund/vocareps.htm>

### **OVC Links to Victim Assistance and Compensation Programs**

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/help/links.htm>

### **Victims Served State-by-State**

State Performance Reports on Victim Compensation and Victim Assistance

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/fund/state.htm>

### **Oral History of the Crime Victim Assistance Field**

Video and Audio Archive

<http://vroh.uakron.edu>

### **Final Report of the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime**

<http://ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/presdntstskforcprpt/welcome.html>

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# SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Date]

## CONTACT:

[Contact Name/Title]

[Agency Name]

[Phone Number]

[E-mail Address]

### **[Your City] Celebrates 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Victims of Crime Act National Crime Victims' Rights Week to Honor Landmark Legislation**


[City/State] April 26 marks the beginning of National Crime Victims' Rights Week, a time to focus on victims of crime and celebrate our nation's progress in serving them. This year's theme, "25 Years of Rebuilding Lives: Celebrating the Victims of Crime Act." honors a landmark national commitment to victims of crime.

Before 1984, victims of crime received little public support. The President's Task Force on Victims of Crime, formed by President Ronald W. Reagan in 1982, found widespread poor treatment of victims by a criminal justice system indifferent to their needs. Although most states had some form of victim compensation, most programs were poorly funded. Despite the few victim assistance programs available in some states and the federal effort to fund victim/witness programs throughout the nation, most communities relied on a few grassroots organizations—funded by sporadic private donations and bake sales—to help victims of crime.

In 1984, moved by the President's Task Force report findings and the work of victim advocates, Congress passed the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), which created the Crime Victims Fund, financed not by taxpayers but by fines and penalties paid by offenders. In 25 years, the Fund has grown from \$68 million to more than \$2 billion and is disbursed throughout the nation in amounts determined by Congress every year.

The Fund supports victim compensation programs, which reimburse victims for many out-of-pocket expenses—such as medical care, counseling, funerals, and lost wages—that victims face in the aftermath of crime. It also helps fund victim assistance programs—such as rape crisis and domestic violence programs—that support victims by providing physical and emotional care and guidance in navigating the criminal justice system. In 2006, VOCA funds supported more than 4,400 public and nonprofit agencies serving almost 4 million victims, and paid more than \$440 million in victim compensation.

"Every day in every state, VOCA shows victims they are not alone," said John W. Gillis, former director of the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. "VOCA represents hope, renewal, and a nation that stands behind victims of crime."

The U.S. Department of Justice will open National Crime Victims' Rights Week with its annual national Candlelight Observance Ceremony on April 23, 2009, and its National Crime Victims' Service Award Ceremony on April 24, 2009, both held in Washington, DC, to honor extraordinary individuals and programs that serve victims of crime. For more information about National Crime Victims' Rights Week and opening ceremonies in [local area], please contact [agency/organization] at [area code/telephone number] or visit [agency's] at [Web site address]. For more information about National Crime Victims' Rights Week, visit the Web site of the Office for Victims of Crime, a component of the Office of Justice Programs within the U.S. Department of Justice, at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ncvrw](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ncvrw). 

**Type your news release, double spaced, on the sample letterhead included in this Resource Guide.  
Distribute your release to local media outlets at least 10 days before the event.**

# SAMPLE PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

## 15-Second PSA

### [Background: clock ticking]

A crime may last only a few seconds. But the impact of that crime can last a lifetime. If you or anyone you know is a victim of crime, help is available. For 25 years, the Victims of Crime Act has supported victim services in communities throughout the nation. To find help in your area, contact [your organization] at [your phone number], or visit [your Web site].

## 30-Second PSA

### [Background: clock ticking]

A crime may last only a few seconds. But the impact of that crime can last a lifetime. Victims of crime need help, and help is available. For 25 years, the Victims of Crime Act has supported thousands of agencies and millions of victims throughout the nation. If you or anyone you know has been harmed by crime, contact [your organization] at [your phone number], or visit [your Web site] for information about services in your community. Thanks to the Victims of Crime Act, help is available.

## 60-Second PSA

### [Background: clock ticking]

A crime may last only a few seconds. But the impact of that crime can last a lifetime. Victims of crime need help, and help is available. For 25 years, the Victims of Crime Act has supported thousands of agencies and millions of victims throughout the nation. The Fund helps provide victim compensation and victim assistance, such as domestic violence shelters

and rape crisis centers. It funds information and support for victims as their cases move through the courts. If you or anyone you know has been harmed by crime, contact [your

organization] at [your phone number], or visit [your Web site] for information about services in your community. Thanks to the Victims of Crime Act, help is available. 25

## 60-Second Broadcast Quality TV PSA

*(featured on the enclosed DVD along with the 5-minute Theme DVD Video)*

**Judge Lois Haight (Chairman, President's Task Force on Victims of Crime, 1982):** For quite some time, we had a criminal justice system that focused on the criminal. It focused on the attorneys and focused on the judges and just ignored and mistreated and blamed the victim.

**Steve Derene (Executive Director, National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators):** Victims became removed from the system. It became pretty common to refer to victims as "the forgotten people."

**Judge Lois Haight:** The Victims of Crime Act made big changes.

**Steve Derene:** Not only did it establish a statutory basis for victim rights, but it provided funding for services.

**Victim Advocate:** Without the money that comes in from the Crime Victims Fund, many victim assistance programs probably would not be able to exist.

**Crime Victim:** With the resources that are available now and the wonderful people who work in victim services, there are people who can help victims like myself to become survivors.

**Victim Advocate:** It's helped thousands of people, one individual person at a time.

*(Interval for local tagging)*

AT THE END OF THE PSA, LOCAL CONTACT INFORMATION CAN BE ADDED DURING A SEVEN-SECOND INTERVAL FOR TAGGING. (Note: White or yellow text works best; some TV stations might be willing to add a voiceover to read your contact information.)

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# HOW TO WRITE AN OP-ED

Through an op-ed in your local paper, you can introduce your community to the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and the reasons National Crime Victims' Rights Week will celebrate VOCA this year. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this historic law reminds Americans how far our nation has come in helping victims of crime rebuild their lives. An effective op-ed can tell a compelling story about why your community should know more about VOCA.

## What Is an Op-Ed?

Op-eds are brief essays in newspapers, often by a non-staff writer, that take a position on a newsworthy topic and seek to convince readers to adopt the writer's point of view. Effective op-ed writers always consider the makeup of their audience and what they want readers to know or do. This year, you may want to educate your community about the importance of the Victims of Crime Act to crime victims and your community.

## Choosing a Strategy

Your main goal is show readers why they should care about the Victims of Crime Act, but you can take several different approaches to meet that goal. A standard op-ed grabs attention with a memorable first line and then states a point of view in the first or second paragraph. If using this approach, you might state in the first paragraph that for 25 years, the Victims of Crime Act

has steadily built a network of supports for crime victims. Then you can describe different categories of VOCA-funded programs with brief anecdotes about how local programs are helping local victims.

Another approach is to pose a question in the title or opening paragraph—such as why the nation will celebrate the Victims of Crime Act this National Crime Victims' Rights Week—and then tell one story about a local victim that answers your question. Either way, you can effectively make your point.

To find background information for your op-ed, try scanning your local newspaper headlines and watch television news (or review your own organization's case files) for stories that typify crime trends in your community. A high percentage of VOCA funds support services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, but you can focus on any type of crime. You can tell the story of an actual crime victim (removing any details that might identify the victim), or you can create a "composite" victim—a fictional victim who represents the kind of cases typical in your area—such as the victim described in the "Sample Op-Ed Column" in this section.

## Op-ed Writers' Checklist

### ☐ **Start with a memorable opening.**

*Example:* "She never knew what would happen when her husband walked through the door."

### ☐ **State the position you are taking in your op-ed.**

*Example:* "VOCA offers millions of American crime victims the tools to help rebuild their lives."

### ☐ **Show your readers why they should care.**

*Example:* "Whether it's domestic violence, identity theft, burglary, or sexual assault, crime can strike anyone at anytime."

### ☐ **Link your op-ed to National Crime Victims' Rights Week.**

*Example:* "April 26 – May 2 is National Crime Victims' Rights Week, when we celebrate how the Victims of Crime Act helps victims across the country and in our own community."

### ☐ **Support your main idea with two or three points.**

*Examples:*

- "Our community is vulnerable to many different types of crimes."
- "The Victims of Crime Act created services previously in short supply."
- "Local victims can access many VOCA-funded services."

## ☐ **Back up your statements with facts, statistics, and quotations.**

*Examples:*

- “The specter of violent crime and the knowledge that, without warning, any person can be attacked or crippled, robbed or killed, lurks at the fringes of [our nation’s] consciousness,” said Judge Lois Haight Herrington, chair of the President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime.<sup>1</sup>
- “Compensation programs paid \$68 million to victims in 1984 and more than \$440 million in 2006.”<sup>2</sup>
- “By 2006, VOCA grants helped fund more than 4,400 public and nonprofit agencies serving almost 4 million victims throughout the nation.”<sup>3</sup>

## ☐ **End by restating the NCVRW theme:**

“This year’s theme, ‘25 Years of Rebuilding Lives: Celebrating the Victims of Crime Act,’ spotlights the network of lifelines VOCA has extended through our nation.”

## **Style Tips**

- ☐ Use short words, sentences, and paragraphs.
- ☐ Use an informal, conversational tone.
- ☐ Use active verbs (e.g., “law enforcement solved the crime” versus “the crime was solved by law enforcement”).
- ☐ Avoid clichés (e.g., “it’s always darkest before the dawn”) and technical jargon (e.g., “victim intake” for “the first meeting with a victim”).
- ☐ Limit your op-ed to 750 words (and check with your local newspaper on length requirements).

## **How to Get Your Op-ed Published**

- ☐ Choose local publications that are likely to accept your submission.
- ☐ Check your newspaper’s guidelines on space limits, deadlines, and other requirements (usually available on the publication’s Web site).
- ☐ Find out how to submit the document: mail, e-mail, or fax.
- ☐ Include your name, address, title, e-mail address, and phone numbers.

<sup>1</sup> Melissa Hook and Anne Seymour, “A Retrospective of the 1982 President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime,” (Washington, DC: Office for Victims of Crime, 2005), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Derene, “Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Crime Victims Fund: Briefing Background 2009 Budget,” (Madison, WI: National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators, 2008), 7.

# SAMPLE OP-ED COLUMN

## Why Celebrate the Victims of Crime Act? 2009 National Crime Victims' Rights Week

*[Note: You can use the following sample case, which is a “composite” drawn from many actual domestic violence cases, or you can substitute a case that occurred in your own community.]*

Last year in [your city] a man left work after arguing with his boss, stopped for a few drinks, then drove home in a foul mood. When he found his wife outside caring for the children instead of making dinner, he flew into a rage. As the children watched in horror, he threw his wife on the ground, kicked her, and when she tried to get up, twisted and fractured her arm. It was the fifth such attack in three months.

A neighbor saw the commotion and called the police, who arrived immediately, witnessed the woman's injuries, and arrested the husband. The officers gave the victim a resource card listing victim services and called an ambulance that took her to the hospital. When the victim returned home, she decided—for the first time—to seek help.

The next day, the victim visited a domestic violence shelter, spoke with a victim advocate, decided to press charges against her husband, and went to court to seek a protection order. A team of domestic violence advocates helped her obtain the order, accompanied her to court proceedings against her husband, arranged for counseling for her and the children, and helped her find a part-time job. They helped her seek victim compensation to receive health care and counseling and to enroll in the state's victim notification system so she would know the instant that her husband was released from jail. For the first time, she and her children were on the road to a safer life.

Twenty-five years ago, most of the services that helped this victim were in short supply. Although many states had victim compensation, most programs were poorly funded. A few grassroots victim assistance organizations had formed throughout the nation, but relatively few victims had access to their services. Victims whose cases reached the criminal justice system found the courts bewildering and indifferent to their needs. No one helped them negotiate the court system, find services, or stay safe.

Then in 1984, in response to a report from President Ronald Reagan's Task Force on Victims of Crime, Congress passed the landmark Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). VOCA established the Crime Victims Fund—supported by fines from offenders rather than taxpayers—to fund victim compensation and victim services throughout the nation as well as training for service providers. In the past 25 years, the Fund has grown from \$68 million to more than \$2 billion, disbursed in amounts determined by Congress every year. In 2006, VOCA grants helped fund more than 4,400 public and nonprofit agencies serving almost 4 million victims throughout the country.<sup>4</sup>

For our local domestic violence victim, VOCA opened the door to safety and hope. VOCA helped fund the resource cards the police officer gave her, the victim advocate who counseled her, and the victim compensation that paid for health care and counseling. Other services—such as VOCA-funded hotlines—were available if she had sought them. Every year, for this victim and millions like her, VOCA offers the tools to build a better life.

This year, National Crime Victims' Rights Week (April 26 to May 2) celebrates the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Victims of Crime Act. The theme, “25 Years of Rebuilding Lives: Celebrating the Victims of Crime Act,” spotlights the network of lifelines VOCA has extended through our nation. In 25 years, VOCA has become “a part of what we are and...how we take care of people,” said Kathryn Turman, director of the FBI Office of Victim Assistance. “The better job we do in taking care of victims, the healthier our communities will be.”<sup>5</sup>

That's why National Crime Victims' Rights Week celebrates the Victims of Crime Act this year.

**Editor's Note:** *The domestic violence case described above is a fictional “composite” drawn from many actual domestic violence cases.*

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<sup>4</sup>Steve Derene, “Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Crime Victim Fund: Briefing Background 2009 Budget,” (Madison, WI: NAVAA, 2008), 7.

<sup>5</sup>Kathryn Turman, interviewed in “History and Impact of the Victims of Crime Act,” <http://www.rijustice.ri.gov/voca> (accessed August 19, 2008).